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Democratic contenders sprint into 5 days of primary hurdles

By Wesley Pruden
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The Democratic candidates for president sprinted toward the Texas caucuses yesterday en route to a Tuesday round of primaries that could determine the outlines of their national nominating convention in San Francisco in mid-July.

Between tonight and Tuesday, Democrats will choose 691 delegates in state primaries, caucuses and other party sessions — nearly one-fifth of the 3,933 delegates who will be in San Francisco's Moscone Center when the opening gavel falls July 16.

Texas chooses 169 delegates in caucuses tomorrow, and Louisiana will choose 57 in a statewide primary.

Colorado will select 43 delegates in caucuses on Monday, and the following day — a Semi-Super Tuesday — statewide voting will choose 154 delegates in Ohio, 77 in Indiana, 75 in North Carolina, and 62 in Maryland.

Democrats will gather for state conventions this weekend in Arkansas, Mississippi, Maine, Montana, Nevada, Oklahoma and Wyoming; 26 additional delegates will be cho-

sen and others will be selected to fill slots reserved by candidates in earlier contests.

Yesterday the three candidates courted the eyes of Texas.

Walter Mondale, the front-runner, visited a family farm near Waco, where he was introduced as the man who would terminate the Republican farm policies that "stink like a hog pen on a hot day in July."

Gary Hart, whose blistering attacks on Mr. Mondale haven't

halted his slide toward oblivion, went to San Antonio and tried his pitch in Spanish.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson had the roughest day of all. First his chartered campaign plane, an aging Lockheed Electra, was bounced around over Texas so severely that the Federal Aviation Administration grounded it until it could be inspected and certified fit to fly again.

Then Mr. Jackson announced he would finally make his oft-delayed trip to Nicaragua and meet with the "contras," the CIA-backed guerrillas who are trying to topple the Marxist Sandinista regime that Mr. Jackson has had nice things to say about.

"I expect to go to Nicaragua and meet with the contra group," he told an airport rally in Tyler, in East Texas. "We can use our minds this time and relate to the contra group. This time around, the people can come together."

A few minutes later, he told startled reporters that he had meant to say he would meet with the Contadora group — representatives of Mexico, Panama, Venezuela, and Colombia who met on Contadora Island last year to outline a 21-point peace plan for the region.

Mr. Jackson said he also plans to meet representatives of the Sandinista government.

Mr. Mondale all but ignored his Democratic rivals to concentrate his fire on the Republican incum-

bent. He told the farmers near Waco that Ronald Reagan posed "perhaps the most severe threat since Herbert Hoover."

If President Reagan's policies continue, he said, "we're close to a point when what we've known as family farms will be gone." He said he would as president guarantee a loan level "geared to the price of production."

Mr. Hart abandoned Texas with two days left to campaign. His campaign headquarters said he had decided that additional personal appearances in Texas would only "divert interest" from a need to get out the vote.

Other Texans noted that Mr. Hart had said he needed "a big win" soon to keep his campaign credible, and said it was clear that it wouldn't be in Texas.

On his last day in Texas, he turned up the heat under his tactic of invective and innuendo, questioning the legitimacy of the Mondale delegates. He suggested they are "tainted" because they were elected with the aid of political action committees — but once more he stopped just short of saying he would challenge their right to be seated in San Francisco.

"I think this is an issue for the party to decide," Mr. Hart said when asked if he would make the challenge. "I have raised the issue. I want to talk to lawyers and experts and people who understand the party rules and the FEC regulations."

"I think the standing of those delegates may be a very serious question," Mr. Hart said.